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Susanna Edwards

Cedarville University, sfedwards@cedarville.edu

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Yarn and Paintbrushes

Susanna Edwards

Susanna Edwards is a Middle Childhood Education major at Cedarville University. As the sixth of eight children from a family based in Delta, Pennsylvania, Susanna loves spending time with her siblings and enjoys sending mail to her loved ones while she is away at school. Her love of writing has been fostered by her jean-of-all-trades mother and her undiscovered would-be professional poet father.

Yarn and paintbrushes. That's what I got for Christmas. Yarn and paintbrushes. To me, these things are not only useful for hours of enjoyment, but they could also lead to contributions for my bank account. They could become instrumental in the making of a gift for a friend, or they could be used in the production of something for myself. No matter how you slice it, yarn and paintbrushes are valuable. The creative possibilities are endless. I have many interests, but my true passion is creating things. I paint, draw, sew, and crochet. I also love floral design. In my opinion, you can fix anything with hot glue. Just about everything I own has been customized in some way with fabric, thread, or paint. In accordance with my craftiness, I have a hard time throwing things away. For example, if a nice large piece of mint-condition cardboard comes into my possession, I view that cardboard not as a cheap, commonplace paper product! Rather, I view that cardboard as possibly pivotal in my next school project or as potentially essential for the next time I need a sturdy tracing template! Yes, having such an attitude towards just about every unwanted thing I see can be a little problematic when it comes to storage. However, having such an attitude has saved me lots of money on craft supplies and has equipped me with more than sufficient materials for just about any project.

The intriguing thing about creativity is that it has multiple facets. Some people are exceptional at creative writing or creative thinking. But to me, artistic creativity can be a wonderful marriage

of the two. To follow a crochet pattern, you must follow the words—words that have been written by a creative thinker. Just like a recipe, a pattern is a guide for creativity. However, a truly skilled cook does not need a recipe. A good cook is marked by his ability to use his knowledge of his ingredients and tools and to manipulate both until he achieves the desired outcome. That is just how art works too! A noteworthy crafter or painter or florist does not need a pattern or instructions to make something beautiful; he needs only knowledge of his materials and a vision that is worth working for. Many things can be trial and error, and sometimes you fail. You must learn to think outside the box. You must learn to see the potential in everything. Diligently working to overcome any obstacle in a project leaves the artist with more knowledge than he started with.

My love and ability to create has been fostered by many people. But, like most of my other interests, my artistic hobbies started with my mom. My mother has successfully seen the elementary and middle school projects of eight children to completion. I vividly remember watching her work with my five older siblings in the years before I was in school. Our split-level Pennsylvania home was always buzzing with activity in those years. Every spring, each school-age child would work on a special project to present at our school's "Excellence Fair." The first project I remember observing was a sock puppet project that my mom did with my older sister Bethany. My mom used a hot glue gun to attach curly, brown synthetic hair to a white sock while Bethany chose a pair of googly eyes and other items to complete the puppet's face. I wished that I too could make a puppet, but, of course, I was too young to use a hot glue gun, and my mom could only give this project so much of her time before she had to make dinner. Though tempted to pout because I was not getting to participate, my mom's answer to my anxious request rang in my ears and then slowly sank into my brain: "Your turn will come." I knew she was right.

Every summer of my childhood, my siblings and I attended Vacation Bible School at our church. VBS was always a highlight of my summer. From the fun songs we sang in the morning and the great prizes you could win for Scripture memory, to the awesome water games we played outside and the red Kool-Aid and Oreos that were given as a snack --every moment of VBS was a blast! But,

VBS was never complete without heading to the basement of the church's recreational building for craft time --craft time with Mrs. Dana. Mrs. Dana is my best friend, Kyla's, mom. The basement was always freezing, which made craft time a refreshing way to cool off after sweating through an active game outside in the June heat. We made everything from picture frames to painted flower pots, and every year the crafts seemed to get better and better! By the end of the week, each VBS student had a collection of handmade masterpieces to take home. I loved every minute of craft time and was always devastated when VBS was over.

Lucky for me, I was best friends with the daughter of "Mrs. Craft Time" herself! That meant that every time Kyla and I had a sleepover we could take advantage of the two large drawers in Mrs. Dana's kitchen that were full of craft supplies! We would sit at the wooden kitchen table with warm sunlight streaming through the sliding kitchen door and painstakingly decide what to make. Our favorite craft to make together was window-clings, flat pictures made of special paint that hardens until you can peel your whole picture away and stick it on a window, or, in our case, in one of the squares on the sliding kitchen door. We wanted to make enough of these clingy things until every square had one. My favorite thing to do at Kyla's house was make crafts, and I think that the many hours we spent together crafting were equally enjoyable for us both and gave us an opportunity to bond through collaboration.

The next step in my creative journey was my fourth grade history project--a seemingly unlikely avenue for promoting creativity. Nevertheless, my saint of a mother suggested that I do a project about the Underground Railroad and make a quilt for the display part of my project. So, that was the plan. I got to choose the colors of the quilt-- purple and green, my favorite colors, and white, because my mom said we needed something to break up the darker colored shades of green and purple I had chosen. We worked on the quilt for at least two months, if not more, in a cluttered corner of a little room in our house we lovingly call the "storage" room. This is a place where we keep everything from a spare refrigerator to our Christmas decorations, but, at the time, this room also housed a small crowded table with a sewing machine on top and a small pedal for the machine underneath. My mom taught me how to cut out the necessary squares and pin them just so. She taught me how

to fasten the material under the needle of the machine and press the pedal at just the right time and in just the right way. By making the quilt with my mom, I learned all about choosing color schemes and working with fabric and thread. At the end of the project, I had gained more than just knowledge-- I had gained a new quilt!

A few years later when I was in middle school, my mom took me and my brother and sisters on what I still think of as a fateful trip to our local library. We were always requesting things online that were sent to our library for pick-up. When my mom went to the front desk to collect our stack of various requested books and movies, she brought back a book for me on how to crochet. "You're always telling me you want to learn," she said as she handed me the book. To this day, I cannot remember ever telling my mom that I wanted to learn how to crochet. Something tells me she was actually thinking, "I've always wanted you to learn how to crochet." Regardless of the fact that the crocheting book was unsolicited, it sparked an interest in me and has led to many, many baby blankets, teddy bears, hats, scarves, and afghans. My mother obviously knows me better than I know myself and her insight and enterprise to introduce me to crocheting was the catalyst for one of the things that has become not just a source of happiness for me, but a way to minister to others with heartfelt, handmade gifts.

Crocheting is not the only creative outlet that my mom nudged me toward without my prompting. At the end of ninth grade, my mom mentioned a florist shop about thirty minutes from our home, whose owner was a personal friend of my grandmother. She asked if I would like to go there for a day and "shadow" the ladies there and learn what I could. Of course, I said yes. So, my grandmother asked her friend if I could come and help out for a day. She said she would love to have me. I was ecstatic! The appointed day rolled around, and I willingly and hopefully walked into that florist shop wearing my favorite plaid shirt and daisy earrings --my "lucky" outfit, you might say. Fresh flowers and silk flowers, candles and cards, gifts, vases, jars, pretty little things of all sorts, and every color of ribbon you can imagine filled every inch of the shop. The ladies at the florist were so hospitable and kind. They showed me all around the shop and taught me about the different flowers, flower care and processing, making bows, setting up arrangements, and many other things that are part of the floral industry. I also got

to make my very own arrangement! They told me I was a natural. After a full day of learning everything about flowers that the ladies at Petals 'N Posies Florist were willing to teach me, I went home with a fresh rose bouquet that I made myself, feeling very contented and excited about the whole thing. To make a long story short, I was asked to come back to the florist and help out during the holidays, because they needed an extra set of hands to make it through the holiday rush. I am now a seasonal employee at Petals 'N Posies and have helped out there for four years. I am learning more and more about floral design and I get to make money while doing so.

The next time that creative ability proved itself practical in my life was two years ago, at the outset of my employment at Susquehanna Orchards, a peach and apple orchard a few minutes from my home in rural Pennsylvania. The sales barn, an old, massive barn full of fresh produce, is used as a retail location for the orchard. It was there that I would spend many hours a week from July through the start of school, and then each Saturday through Thanksgiving. I would be sorting peaches, helping customers, answering the phone, emptying "rot-buckets," and doing whatever else was necessary to keep the sales barn functioning like a well-oiled machine. In my first week, I noticed that almost all the price signs posted around the barn were hand-written. I wanted so much to make a sign—first, because it would give me a chance to sit down, and second, because the idea of a blank piece of paper and a container full of magic markers always gets me excited. I got the chance to make a sign and I proudly stapled it to a wall of the sales barn, colorfully informing the customers that our locally grown tomatoes were \$1.50 per pound. A few hours later, the owner of the orchard came into the barn and noticed my sign. He suggested that I make all the necessary signs for the orchard going forward. Needless to say, I was thrilled. I had been given a chance to incorporate creativity into an otherwise potentially monotonous job, and my artwork, of sorts, would be posted all over the barn!

Nevertheless, creativity's most recent triumph in my life was in the form of an old piano bench, sandpaper, acrylic paints, a printed copy of an impressionist masterpiece, a lot of spare time, and a school Christmas concert. In my tenth grade art class, my teacher assigned each student an old wooden chair. My teacher, a thrifty, out-of-the-box thinker like myself, had procured the

wooden chairs mostly from yard sales, but she did find one of them on the side of the road (which is nothing short of awesome, in my estimation!). The idea was that each student would choose a famous artist to research, select one of the artist's paintings, and then do his best to replicate the chosen painting on his assigned chair. I chose an Australian impressionist, Robert Hagan, whose beachscapes are simply breathtaking! After sanding and priming my chair, I worked for just over a month painting one of his masterpieces on the seat of my chair. The finished product was better than I could have ever hoped and the reactions I got when I brought my chair into school made me realize the lucrative possibilities in furniture painting. Two summers ago, my mom was collecting furniture from our home to get rid of. In her pile was an old piano bench. Upon noticing the bench, I quickly salvaged it from the "to be disposed" pile (with my mom's blessing, of course) and sanded it down until it was silky smooth. Then, I selected another beachscape painting of Robert Hagan's to use as a guide. During the next few months, I often trekked over to my neighbor's basement, a location that was generously offered as a "studio" for me, and pushed paint around on the top of the bench until I decided to stop for the day. I continued this ritual for two summers until, finally, I finished painting the bench this past October.

Every Christmas, our school puts on two Christmas concerts, one featuring the high school students and one featuring the elementary and kindergarten students. For the past few years, the German language department has hosted a craft market during the intermissions of both concerts, selling handmade items ranging from earrings to Christmas cookies. The proceeds of the sale go to the German students who are trying to fund a study trip to Germany, and that year I was one of them. I brought my custom, hand-painted beach bench to the market to sell in a silent auction. At second concert, a man bid \$300 for my bench—he was the winner! I expected to get \$150 at the most for my bench, even though I felt it was worth much more because of all the hours I had poured into making the painting as precise as possible. I was speechless! Before the sale, I had not committed to going to Germany because I simply did not know if I could scrape together enough money for the trip and I needed a clear indication from God that I was supposed to go. The sale of my painted bench was the sign I needed. After the sale,

I committed to the trip and got to spend an incredible 2 weeks in Europe just a few months later!

In my life, creativity is a legacy, a memory, a hobby, a job, and a gift—a gift from God, the Creator Himself. Seeing the potential and value in yarn and paint brushes is evidence of an innovative mindset and an opportunity to decide what the outcome will be. I agree with George Louis: “Creativity can solve almost any problem.” Learning to use the figurative yarn and paint brushes of life—whatever resources you have—is the surest way to meet a need. Be creative!